

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

By

TONIA SUSANNE BONNELL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

PRINTMAKING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

Submitted by Tonia Susanne Bonnell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: TONIA SUSANNE BONNELL

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DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE
Variation 2 Insurance Value: \$600.00	2005	Engraving, woodcut, chine collé	27" x 26"
Variation 4 Insurance Value: \$600.00	2005	Engraving, etching chine collé	27" x 26"
Variation 5 Insurance Value: \$600.00	2005	Engraving, chine collé	27" x 26"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition is dedicated in memory of my grandfathers Murlin Totten (1917-2002) and Leo Bonnell (1926-2002) who, as farmers, influenced my work ethic and sense of connection to the landscape, an inspiration for my work.

I thank the University of Alberta Department of Art and Design for the learning opportunities provided to me while studying for my Master's degree.

I extend immeasurable thanks to my supervisor, Sean Caulfield not only for the time, energy, commitment and encouragement given to me throughout my studies, but for being an excellent example to follow as an artist involved in academia, the local community, and international art world.

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My parents and family for supporting me (in innumerable ways) throughout my education

And finally, my fiancé, Todd Fleming, for encouragement and patience as well as website and postcard designs

“There is unquestionable evidence that the formation of everything we see
is governed by that which we now cannot.”

-Lawrence Krauss¹

Drawn to natural occurrences like snow falling, storms developing, and dust particles floating, I rely on my surrounding environment (in terms of landscape, climate, and weather) for initial inspiration in creating my images. These visually accessible occurrences, which consist of individual parts forming a mass, act as a bridge, leading me to consider spaces less tangible and more overlooked. In our everyday lives we breathe air and pass through perceived empty spaces, rarely considering our dependence upon the realm of the unseen. Spaces that seem empty are overlooked, not only because human eyes cannot see what fills them, but also because of their constancy. (Unless we experience drastic changes—as in altitude, we rarely consider the amount of oxygen we take in with each breath.) When change is not evident, we allow a veil of normalcy to prevent us from noticing basic elements of life. Human range of visibility does not allow us to see the molecules, atoms, and microscopic particles that form our perceptible world. Even the vacuum, as explored in quantum theory, is “neither empty nor featureless” but contains both residual energy and a complex structure.² Within a fast-paced, “seeing-is-believing” culture, I attempt to shift the viewer’s focus toward the powerful presence of quiet, breathing, real spaces that allow for our being.

Drawing repetitive marks, I engage in a focused activity that is reflected in the meditative nature of the finished pieces. Each “particle” is quiet, yet clearly and deliberately stated through the graphic characteristic of the mark. I appreciate the clarity that the lines of early printmaking techniques (engraving, etching, woodcut) provide, and I use them, not traditionally (to form an illusion of a recognizable image), but to achieve the most basic mark: a short, straight line. By limiting my means of expression, I’m able to investigate the dynamic capabilities of the seemingly simple marks that, like notes of music, gain complexity when composed. In terms of movement and stillness, the visual experiences of my works vary, as fog differs from a blizzard or hailstorm. The scale of each image relates to the size of mark that most suits the medium: etching allows for minute, precise detail; engraving provides a “characteristic hair-thin line,”³ and the nature of wood demands a larger tool and more aggressive force to cut. Shifts in scale allow for different experiences, whether intimate or enveloping. Within each series, the density, sparseness, value, and directional movement become crucial to the psychological effect. Essential to all pieces is the shift that happens when the viewer approaches the work. While I work from part to whole, the viewer experiences the work from the whole (an atmospheric image) to the part (a recognition of individual marks.) A phase transition, like water forming into ice, occurs within the viewer’s perception when approaching the work: atmospheric fields crystallize.

03-2005

¹ Lawrence Krauss, *The Fifth Essence* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), xv.

² B Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality: A Contemplative View of Physics and the Mind* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989), 10.

³ Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2001), 185.

TONIA BONNELL:
ENUNCIATED MURMURS (PHASE TRANSITION)

LIST OF WORKS

Fluctuating Interludes

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|--|
| 1. | updraft , 2005
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etching, chine collé |
| 2. | opening , 2005
engraving, chine collé | 13. | Absence , 2003
etching, chine collé |
| 3. | momentary blindness , 2005
engraving, chine collé | 14. | Blindspot , 2004
etching, chine collé |
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engraving, chine collé | 15. | Backdrop , 2003
etching, chine collé |
| 5. | morphic fields , 2005
engraving, chine collé | 16. | Remnants , 2005
etching, chine collé |

Syncopated Movements

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| 6. | variation 1 , 2005
engraving, chine collé | 17. | Expansions of Nothing , 2004
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| 7. | variation 2 , 2005
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| 8. | variation 3 , 2005
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engraving, etching, chine collé |
| 9. | variation 4 , 2005
engraving, etching, chine collé | 19. | Burst/Pour , 2004
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| 10. | variation 5 , 2005
engraving, chine collé | 20. | Trail , 2004
engraving, digital, chine collé |
| | | 21. | Funnel , 2004
engraving, digital, chine collé |
| 11. | Anticipated Turbulence , 2005
woodcut, monotype | | |

tonia bonnell

enunciated

MULTIPLIES

[PHASE TRANSITION]

22 march – 2 april, 2005

THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 7:00 – 10:00 PM

TUESDAY TO FRIDAY: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

SATURDAY: 2:00 – 5:00 PM

[CLOSED SUNDAY, MONDAY AND STATUTORY HOLIDAYS]



THIS EXHIBITION IS THE FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN PRINTMAKING

[DEPARTMENT OF ART + DESIGN] UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Murmurs of the art

Artist Tonia Bonnell's rural upbringing makes its voice heard in *Enunciated Murmurs*

BY AGNIESZKA MATEJKO

It was two years ago that I first met Tonia Bonnell; she was assigned to be my teaching assistant in a fine arts course. I immediately sensed that there was a sense of a different culture about her—yet she had no accent besides a slight American twang from her home state of Illinois. She looked like every other fine arts graduate student in her uniform of blue jeans and baggy T-shirts. And yet, I could not get over the feeling that there was something exotic about her, as if she had come from a different world. "Perhaps she dropped into Edmonton on a tornado, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*," I mused. "After all, Illinois and Kansas are not that far apart." But despite my subtle prodding, I could not discover anything in her background that would stand out as unusual—nothing, that is, until we met again to speak about

her graduating exhibition *Enunciated Murmurs*, currently on display in the Fine Arts Building Gallery, a show that is her final visual presentation for her Master of Fine Arts degree.

It was only then that I realized that the mystery of her background had been right in front of my eyes all along. It was simple: unlike most of us who were bred, born and raised among the cement walls of urban centres, Bonnell grew up on

PROFILE VISUAL ARTS

the open prairie. "I have always been surrounded by open fields and sky," Bonnell says. "The town I lived in had 250 people. I knew everybody." That was it! I thought. Bonnell radiates that same mysterious composure that I've often observed in farmers and other rural people who are used to treating others like human beings and not life support systems for wallets. These are people who are used to working themselves to the bone and then waiting and unwearyingly watching for clouds of rain to form across the horizon.

Only for Bonnell's community, those clouds took a particularly

ominous turn. "Where I am from, you always get tornado warnings," she recalls stoically. "We aren't afraid of them; we look for funnels in the sky. They seldom happen." Bonnell spent a lot of time out on those fields looking at the sky. Her grandparents, who were farmers on both sides of the family, often took her along when they worked. "Driving up and down these roads takes so long, but you do it all day, dawn to dusk," she recalls. "Depending on the weather, they have to get it done."

GROWING UP in that rural community taught Bonnell a different way of looking at the world. "[In farming] there is no sense of building up to a climax and ending," she explains. "There is just continuous repetition." This was a lesson she incorporated right into her art; Bonnell's prints are built up out of thousands of repeated marks that take her days, hours and sometimes months to accomplish. "It strains certain parts of the body," she says without a trace of complaint. "I think that the repetitive mark-making allows me to block out some of the information-loaded society."

Out of this myriad of abstracted marks emerge atmospheric images

that drift across a white page like grey rain drifting against the wide expanse of a clear sky. But viewed from another angle, they seem more like gusts of wind, drifts of snow or quickly approaching clouds. Bonnell's images are gentle, ethereal, but their delicacy seems to disguise a hidden power—like sunny days that either warm seeds into sprouting or slowly, relentlessly desiccate fields. "You know clouds are intangible, yet they can visually cover a big mountain," Bonnell explains. In some of the prints, Bonnell's gently billowing "clouds" take on clear signs of their supreme power: they form the foreboding shape of a grey funnel.

Although Bonnell has come far from her rural, mostly blue-collar community into the intellectual ferment of one of North America's best printmaking departments, she

hasn't lost the sense of her roots. "Eventually I would love to return to a rural community," she says. But that may not be possible now that she is a few days short of getting her MVA degree, which will allow her to teach at a university. Whatever happens, she says, she will always return to nature. But wherever she ends up, I doubt she will ever forget the lesson she learned on her grandparents' farm as she watched the sky for signs of funnel clouds and felt part of something larger than herself. "As a human being, you can't always control it," she explains with the composure of a seasoned farmer. "We don't always know it's coming." ♦

ENUNCIATED MURMURS
By Tonia Bonnell • FAB Gallery
(University of Alberta) • To Apr. 2

Inspired by the big and small

Tonia Bonnell, a University of Alberta MFA Printmaking graduate, was inspired by very small objects and very big spiritual concepts in her *Enunciated Murmurs* print exhibit currently on display at the university's F&B Gallery.

"On the one hand I'm inspired by natural occurrences like falling snowflakes, dust particles in the air as well as microscopic particles, and on the other hand I'm also commenting on things that we can't see on a spiritual level," says the Illinois native who's been studying in Alberta for the past three years.

"I was initially inspired by how it's impossible to create a truly perfect vacuum. There's always something that remains. To that end, I'm creating paintings that address artistic structure within the Buddhist need for emptiness."

Working with some of the oldest of printmaking technologies such as etching and woodcuts, Bonnell has reduced her subject matter to a short, simple drawn/etched line which she then repeats hundreds if not thousands of times to create her atmospheric print images.

"I'm very connected to the mark—a straight short tick—which was chosen because it's the smallest conscious mark I can make. It's both a reductive as well as a meditative tactic that requires all my attention and focus."

Gilbert A. Bouchard

Special to The Journal



Print artist Tonia Bonnell with her artwork called *Anticipated Turbulence, monotype*.

PREVIEW

Ports of Entry — East

Showing at: Agnes Bugera Gallery, 12310 Jasper Ave.

Until: March 31

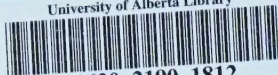
Tonia Bonnell's *Enunciated Murmurs*

Showing at: F&B Gallery, 1-1 U of A Fine Arts Building, 112th

Street and 89th Avenue

Until: April 2

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